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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to assess one of the greatest challenges encountered by small island states to find appropriate economic activities which generate income for their citizens. In spite of their small size, such states often succeed in competing internationally in tourism, principally due to their tropical location and their "islandness" which is often a tourist attraction in itself. However, price competitiveness is very important for the tourist industry of small island states, which have to compete intensely between themselves, and with larger countries, such as Spain, France, Mexico, and others, which have very similar sun and sea attractions to those offered by small island states.

Besides price, there are other factors that affect tourism demand. Such non-price factors include: income levels of the travellers, exchange rate variations, promotion and advertising, language of the host country, accommodation capacity, and social and political stability. However this paper focuses only on price competitiveness since it has a major important influence on tourism demand.

In many small island states tourism has become the mainstay of the economy, generating considerable income and employment. According to McElroy (2002), since 1950 tourism has lead to the reorientation of small island economies away from traditional export such as sugar, towards mass tourism development, related construction and financial services. It is therefore important that small island states offer this service at a competitive price in order to continue reaping the benefits of tourism.

This paper will compare a number of island states in terms of prices that tourists are expected to pay for their airfares and accommodation which take a relatively high proportion of tourist expenditure.

The paper is organised as follows. In the section that follows this introduction the methodology used to conduct the analysis is explained. The next section presents the results of the analysis of the research conducted. It explains data gathered regarding prices of flights departing from three major airports and the cost of three and four star hotels for two persons sharing a single room on a bed and breakfast basis, in the destinations considered. The final section concludes the study, and puts forward a number of policy implications relating to the results of the study.

2. Assessing Competitiveness

The small island states included in this study are located in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and the Mediterranean and Caribbean seas. These are Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Cyprus, Fiji, Jamaica, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Seychelles, St. Lucia, and Vanuatu.

In order to assess price competitiveness in these small island states, the cost of accommodation and the cost of flights were compared. [1]

Given the limited budget and time constraints imposed on this study, the present author used an internet based travelling agency known as Expedia to obtain information of prices related to travelling and accommodation. (Expedia, 2009).

Expedia provides direct access to a wide selection of travel products and services. The company helps various consumer segments with booking airline tickets, hotel reservations, car rentals, cruises and holiday packages via the World Wide Web and telephone travel agents. The only restriction to using this website is that the consumer must be at least eighteen years of age.

Flight Analysis

Statistical data was obtained regarding flights departing from three principle airports namely London (Heathrow Airport), America (Miami International Airport) and Australia (Melbourne Airport). These airports where chosen because they are the major point of departure from which most visitors to the island destination considered in this study, depart.

The flights analysed consisted in a roundtrip for two adults in economy class during the 20th July to 27th July 2009 and 20th January to 27th January 2010. The dates taken into consideration consist of a one week period because this is the average duration of a holiday. Whilst, two distinct months were chosen in order to incorporate the peak season for the small island states analysed. Results lead to a wide array of prices for flights, and it was decided to take the cheapest for the purpose of this study.

[1] A cross-section analysis across countries, as is the case of this paper, has been conducted by Briguglio and Vella (1995), who calculated price competitiveness in Mediterranean destinations. They utilised information on prices as charged by different tour operators for a one week visit to a given destination, including flights and accommodation in a five-star, four-star or three-star hotel. This information was supplemented by an indication of the cost of living in the destinations. Briguglio and Vella stress that price competitiveness is not the only factor that affects tourism demand, but it is a very important factor. Despite being uncompetitive in price islands may have a number of non-price factors that may still render it attractive example marketing and promotional campaigns, qualified human resources, use of modern technology, improvement in the environment.

Hotel Analysis

The hotel accommodations analysed consist of a single room for two people in three star and four star hotels, on a bed and breakfast basis in the vicinity of an attraction. The dates reserved were the same as those mentioned for the flight details.

Again here, there was a wide array of prices, and again the cheapest prices were taken into consideration for the purpose of this study. In all 60 hotels were assessed, given that two hotels (three and four star) for July 2009 and two hotels (three and four star) for January 2010 for the twelve destinations were analysed.

On March 2009, the first data analysis was conducted for the July 2009 travelling and hotel accommodation arrangements. Whilst in April 2009 data was conducted for January 2010. The data was obtained some time before the travelling dates to ensure availability and over a very short period of time to ensure consistency.

The prices of the packages were converted into Euro (€) according to the rate of exchange set by the European Central Bank.

3. Overall Results and Findings

Flight Costs

Table 1 presents the findings with regard to flights from Heathrow airport to the Island destinations. The second column indicates prices in Euro (€) for flights departing from London, Heathrow Airport in July 2009 whilst the third column indicates the prices for the same flight in January 2010. The cheapest prices of each group have been taken into consideration. Amounts have been rounded and the table is sorted in ascending order according to the average.

Table 1:

Costs of Flights Departing from London, Heathrow Airport.

Destination	Jul-09	Jan-10	AVG
	€ EURO	€ EURO	
Malta	529	244	387
Cyprus	785	564	675
The Bahamas	1653	1120	1387
Maldives	1510	1286	1398
Jamaica	1882	1287	1585
Antigua & Barbuda	1847	1364	1605
St Lucia	2070	1391	1730
Barbados	2229	1390	1809
Mauritius	2384	1443	1913
Seychelles	1145	3210	2178
Fiji	3459	2987	3223
Vanuatu	6895	7630	7263

Source: Author's calculations and Expedia (2009)

As expected Malta and Cyprus are the two cheapest destinations to travel to from London Heathrow Airport because they are only 2,090 kilometres and 3,222 kilometres respectively distant from Heathrow. The most expensive destinations are Fiji and Vanuatu, which are located in the Pacific Ocean.

Table 2 presents the same information as Table 1 but this time applicable to flights departing from Miami International Airport.

Table 2:

Costs of Flights Departing from America, Miami International Airport

Destination	Jul-09	Jan-10	AVG
	€ EURO	€ EURO	
The Bahamas	266	301	283
Jamaica	561	491	526
Barbados	792	681	737
Antigua & Barbuda	973	705	839
St Lucia	1096	701	899
Cyprus	2066	1523	1795
Malta	2518	1250	1884
Maldives	3487	2546	3016
Mauritius	4290	3129	3709
Fiji	6471	2056	4264
Vanuatu	4823	6911	5867
Seychelles	5323	7964	6643

Source: Author's calculations and Expedia (2009)

The second and the third columns again indicate prices for flights departing in July 2009 and January 2010. The fourth column gives the average of both flights for the same destination.

The table indicates that the cheapest flights from Miami International Airport are for The Bahamas and Jamaica, whilst the most expensive are Vanuatu and Seychelles with an average price of €5867 and €6643 respectively. As expected the variation in price is due to the distance. Miami International Airport is 301 kilometres away from The Bahamas and 935 kilometres away from Jamaica. (Time and Date.com, 2009).

Table 3 presents flight prices departing from Australia, Melbourne Airport to the respective island destinations.

Table 3:

Costs of Flights Departing from Australia, Melbourne Airport

Destination	Jul-09	Jan-10	AVG
	€ EURO	€ EURO	
Fiji	1272	1172	1222
Vanuatu	1066	1481	1273
Maldives	1815	1681	1748
Cyprus	3000	1961	2481
Malta	2797	2825	2811
Jamaica	3722	3546	3634
Barbados	3683	3600	3641
The Bahamas	3638	4252	3945
Antigua & Barbuda	4227	3785	4006
St Lucia	4725	3548	4137
Mauritius	6006	3369	4687
Seychelles	2701	8711	5706

Source: Author's calculations and Expedia (2009)

Again the second and the third columns indicate that the difference in price between July and January flights is minimal when considering Malta (€28) but there is a difference of €6010 when flying to Seychelles in January.

The fourth column gives the average of both flights for the same destination. Expectedly Fiji, Vanuatu and Maldives are the cheapest flights, whilst St.Lucia, Mauritius and Seychelles are the most expensive. The distance of Fiji is 3,914 Kilometres, Vanuatu is 3,183 kilometres, Maldives is 8,881 kilometres, St. Lucia is 16,340 kilometres, Mauritius is 8,452 kilometres and Seychelles is 9,652 kilometres. This indicates that although Seychelles flights are the most expensive it is not the most remote island, thus the price could either signify the high tourism demand or the fact that price does not necessarily affect competitiveness.

Table 4 gives the average costs of flights for every destination departing from the three airports analysed. The Table takes two averages, the first shown in the fifth column of the Table is a simple average relating to flights from the three airports. Whilst, the average in the sixth column is a weighted one, with the weights derived from percentages of

tourists, classified by nationality, who are likely to have visited these small island states in recent years (see Appendix).

The simple average shown in Table 4 may be somewhat misleading because it implicitly assumes that the small island states attract equal numbers of tourists from the regions represented by the three airports. In reality, small island states in a given region attract most of its tourists from the same region. For example, most tourist visiting Fiji and Vanuatu leave from Australia and most tourists visiting Malta and Cyprus leave from European Airports.

Thus, for this reason a weighted average was computed using the inflow of tourists as weights. As explained above, the weighted average is more meaningful than the simple average.

Table 4:

Tabulated Results of Flight Averages

Destination	Heathrow	Miami	Melbourne	Simple Average	Weighted Average
Antigua & Barbuda	1605	839	4006	2150	1191
The Bahamas	1387	283	3945	1872	836
Barbados	1809	737	3641	2062	1209
Cyprus	675	1795	2481	1650	738
Fiji	3223	4264	1222	2903	2707
Jamaica	1585	526	3634	1915	1068
Maldives	1398	3016	1748	2054	1745
Malta	387	1884	2811	1694	926
Mauritius	1913	3709	4687	3436	2571
Seychelles	2178	6643	5706	4842	3597
St Lucia	1730	899	4137	2255	2225
Vanuatu	7263	5867	1273	4801	2537

Source: Author's calculations

It should be noted that the huge discrepancy in average prices expectedly depends on the distance from the airport analysed. The Mediterranean islands of Malta and Cyprus are the cheapest destinations departing from London, Heathrow Airport and distant destinations located in the Pacific and Indian Ocean are the most expensive. The same applies to flights departing from America, Miami International Airport where the cheapest flights are

to The Bahamas and Jamaica. A similar situation is also reflected in Vanuatu and Fiji for flights departing from Australia, Melbourne Airport.

Table 5 shows a weighted average, taken from the sixth column of Table 4 in order of prices, with the cheapest first.

Table 5

Destinations Classified by Cost of Flights (weighted average of airports)

Destination	Weighted Average
Cyprus	738
The Bahamas	836
Malta	926
Jamaica	1068
Antigua & Barbuda	1191
Barbados	1209
Maldives	1745
St Lucia	2225
Vanuatu	2537
Mauritius	2571
Fiji	2707
Seychelles	3597

Source: Author's calculations

The cheapest flights, as expected, are for destinations that are not far from the region where the tourists originate, namely Cyprus, The Bahamas and Malta. Flights to the Caribbean destinations are almost equally priced. The most expensive destinations according to the weighted average are Mauritius, Fiji and Seychelles.

Cost of Accommodation

The study covers hotel accommodations for two people in three star and four star hotels, in a single room, on a bed and breakfast basis. The hotels sampled were those featured on the internet based travelling agency as on June 2009 and January 2010. The cheapest prices of each group were always taken into consideration.

The following table indicates the costs of hotel accommodation for both three and four star hotels during the month of July 2009.

Table 6:

Costs of Hotel Accommodations in July 2009

Destination	Jul-09		AVG
	3 Star	4 Star	
	€ EURO	€ EURO	
Fiji	166	300	233
Malta	268	383	325
Mauritius	141	653	397
St Lucia	287	622	455
Jamaica	277	798	538
Barbados	365	1098	731
Cyprus	366	1131	749
Vanuatu	531	999	765
Maldives	705	907	806
The Bahamas	649	1157	903
Seychelles	681	1296	989
Antigua & Barbuda	691	2424	1557

Source: Author's calculations and Expedia (2009)

The second column indicates prices in Euro (€) for three star hotels whilst the third column indicates the prices for four star hotels. The fourth column gives the average of both the three star and four star hotel prices for the respective destinations.

The Table indicates that the most affordable hotels in Fiji and Malta, have a price range between (€200 - €350). The prices in the second group, relating to hotels in Mauritius, St. Lucia, Jamaica, Barbados and Cyprus, vary between (€351 - €750) whilst the most expensive hotels are located in Vanuatu, Maldives, The Bahamas, Seychelles and Antigua and Barbuda (€751 - €1600).

The tabulated results of the hotel accommodation in January 2010 are indicated in Table 7.

Table 7:

Costs of Hotel Accommodations in January 2010

Destination	Jan-10		AVG
	3 Star	4 Star	
	€ EURO	€ EURO	
Malta	112	139	126
Fiji	157	383	270
Cyprus	308	242	275
Mauritius	201	876	538
Jamaica	568	1053	811
Vanuatu	488	1137	812
St Lucia	573	1066	819
Barbados	660	1946	1303
Seychelles	942	1959	1450
The Bahamas	1313	2082	1697
Maldives	721	2699	1710
Antigua & Barbuda	1069	3261	2165

Source: Author's calculations and Expedia (2009)

Table 7 shows the same information like the previous table. However, the statistical data is for January 2010. During the month of January on average, the cheapest hotel accommodations are Malta, Fiji and Cyprus with less than €300 whereas Maldives and Antigua and Barbuda are the most expensive.

Table 8 presents the July and January averages derived from the preceding tables.

Table 8:

Results of Simple Averages of Hotel Accommodations

Destination	Jul	Jan	Simple AVG
Malta	325	126	226
Fiji	233	270	252
Mauritius	397	538	468
Cyprus	749	275	512
St Lucia	455	819	637
Jamaica	538	811	675
Vanuatu	765	812	789
Barbados	731	1303	1017
Seychelles	989	1450	1220
Maldives	806	1710	1258
The Bahamas	903	1697	1300
Antigua & Barbuda	1557	2165	1861

Source: Author's calculations

The second and third columns are the hotel averages for July 2009 and January 2010. The fourth column indicates the simple average. As indicated, Malta and Fiji offer the cheapest hotel accommodations with a simple average less than €300 whilst The Bahamas and Antigua and Barbuda are the most expensive.

The cost of a travel and accommodation

Table 9 indicates the averages of the hotel accommodation for both July 2009 and January 2010 and the weighted average price for a flights leaving from the three airports analysed.

Table 9:

Total Cost of Holiday

Destination	Hotel Costs	Flight Costs (Weighted average)	Total cost of holiday
Malta	226	926	1152
Cyprus	512	738	1250
Jamaica	675	1068	1743
The Bahamas	1300	836	2136
Barbados	1017	1209	2226
St Lucia	637	2225	2862
Fiji	252	2707	2959
Maldives	1258	1745	3003
Mauritius	468	2571	3039
Antigua & Barbuda	1861	1191	3052
Vanuatu	789	2537	3326
Seychelles	1220	3597	4817

Source: Author's calculations

Table 9 is divided into four columns. The second column indicates the simple average of three and four star hotels in July 2009 and January 2010. The third column shows the weighted average of flight costs. The fourth column shows the cost of the holiday for a tourist couple when travelling to the respective destinations.

The cheapest holiday destinations are Malta, Cyprus and Jamaica with an average cost less than €2000 per week, whilst the most expensive destinations are Vanuatu and Seychelles with an average cost exceeding €3326.

Correlation Between Tourist Inflows And Costs

Table 10 shows the number of tourists visiting each small island state and the cost of a holiday, as calculated in the pervious section.

Table 10:

Cost of a Holiday and Tourist Inflows

Destinations	Tourist Inflows '000	Total cost of holiday €'000
Antigua & Barbuda	745	3.05236
The Bahamas	4731	2.13634
Barbados	1111	2.22568
Cyprus	2626	1.24986
Fiji	545	2.95879
Jamaica	3016	1.7434
Maldives	357	3.00278
Malta	1532	1.15198
Mauritius	802	3.03894
Seychelles	151	4.81743
St Lucia	670	2.86215
Vanuatu	154	3.32624

Source: Author's calculations and Commonwealth Secretariat (2009:124)

Table 10 shows that the most competitive small island state tourist destinations, in terms of flights and hotels tend to be those that attract most tourists. For example, it is probable that Malta and Cyprus attract so many tourists because the price of a holiday could be relatively cheap.

The data indicated in Table 10 was used to fit a line between the two variables. Given that the relation does not seem to be linear, a non-linear equation was utilised with the following results:

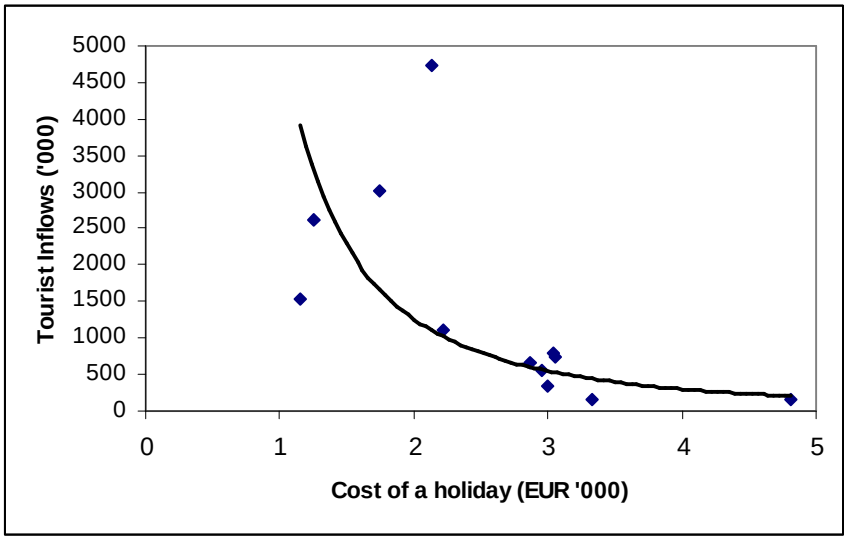
$T = 5223.4\ C^{-2.05}$

$R^2 = 0.7$

Where T is tourist inflows and C is Cost of a holiday.[2] The result of plotting the scatter diagram and the fitted line are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1:

Relation between Costs of a Holiday and Tourist Inflows



Source: Calculations obtained from Table 12

This relationship is probably too simplistic because tourist inflows are influenced by factors other than cost. If other variables were included, such as the quality of the product, the relation could have improved. For example the outlier point in the above diagram pertains to The Bahamas, the inflow of tourists is very high, and this probably because of the attraction of this destination arising from factors other than price.

However the main conclusion that emerges from the analysis is that the cost of a holiday is likely to affect demand for tourism in a particular island destination. Hence the importance of price competitiveness and the need for island destinations to render themselves more price attractive if they wish to attract more tourists. This does, of course, not negate the importance of other factors that attract tourists, such as the quality of the product.

[2] The regression method was used to estimate this equation in the form $Ln(T) = a_0 + a_1 ln(C)$ which was transformed into natural logs to linearise it. The coefficient a_1 was found to be statistically significantly different from zero at the 95% level

4. Limitations and Strengths of the Study

The Limitations

The method however has a number of limitations. The research does not relate to all types of tourism, since it only covers those who visit hotel destinations on a bed and breakfast basis. It does not take into consideration the one-star, two-star or five-star hotels.

Another limitation is that it only covers tourists originating from London (Heathrow Airport), America (Miami International Airport) and Australia (Melbourne Airport). Had the author been able to extend this study, further flights would have been analysed departing from other renowned locations.

Information from One Source Only

The prices analysed have all been obtained through Expedia. However, the internet travelling agency pre-negotiates certain room rates with hotel suppliers to facilitate the booking of reservations on behalf of the customer. The room rates displayed on the Website are a combination of the pre-negotiated room rates for rooms reserved on behalf of the customer and the facilitation fee retained by the company for the service provided. Such fees vary according to the service provided. Thus, should the same study have been conducted through a different channel it might have different results.

Taking the Cheapest Option

Although the cheapest options have always been taken into consideration, it does not necessarily mean that they are the best options for travellers. The flights chosen can be at awkward hours or could incur long and strenuous flights.

Problems with Averages

Averages may be misleading, as in reality not even one observation could be exactly equal to the average. However, at the same time averages have the advantage to indicate an overall tendency. The results of Table 10 have therefore to be interpreted in this spirit.

Cost of Living

The cost of a holiday is not just hotel and flight. For example, a factor which is likely to influence competitiveness is the cost of living in the destination. Although this is not explicitly included in the calculations presented within this analysis it is implicitly included in the hotel prices. Thus, it can be safely assumed that a destination where prices are high such prices will be reflected in the price of the hotel

However it would have been useful if a Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) indicator is utilised to refine the price differences indicated in the studies so as to assess the impact of the cost of living.

Quality of the Tourist Product

This analysis does not take account of the quality of the tourism product, which can be augmented by tourist attractions such as cultural assets and recreational possibilities which could be important consideration as to why a tourist chooses one destination and not another. Some island states manage to attract more high quality tourism than others possibly because of one or two famous hotels such as is the case of Sandy Lane in Barbados.

Different Destinations have their Own Peculiar Attractions

Some of the destinations are mature while others are emerging, this may also affect tourism demand in a way which is difficult to predict. For example an emerging tourist destination may attract tourists that seek new avenues. Whereas a mature destination may attract the so called "repeat tourists", who prefer to visit the same place year after year or who demand developed tourist facilities.

The islands states selected for the purpose of this study are mostly tropical and therefore offer similar attractions. The islands of Malta and Cyprus are not tropical, but possibly have a richer cultural heritage than the tropical ones – while not being as well endowed with ecological attractions as much as the tropical islands.

Again, this study has not taken the special features of the islands into consideration.

Usefulness of the Study

The approach used to obtain flight and accommodation prices proved useful because it enabled the author to obtain information on remote islands without having to physically visit the travelling agencies and in a relatively short period. The information obtained was extensive and inexpensive, and given the time-constraints, the results produced are very interesting.

The study shows that a public domain internet site can produce useful information about tourism competitiveness, thereby meeting the research criterion of parsimony in terms of financial expense and time. Moreover, this study has been useful in deriving policy implications for small island states to promote competitiveness in their tourist industry.

6. Conclusion

This paper attempted to assess the competitiveness of islands as tourist destinations by using information on prices of flights and hotels, which are major components of the price of a holiday.

Despite the limitations encountered during this study, the conclusions that emerged have implications that could be helpful for the small island state governments to market the destinations and choose particular target audiences.

One important conclusion is that remote small island states stand at a disadvantage in terms of flights costs. Malta and Cyprus, for example, are major tourist pullers, possibly because of the relative low cost of a holiday there. A policy implication of this is that a reduction in flight costs could be of major benefit in promoting. Vanuatu and Samoa, for example, recently liberalised and privatised their air transport to the islands, with impressive results for their tourist industries, as competition was introduced in the price in air traffic to these countries.

Likewise, the price of accommodation varied between destinations. In certain places, where the Gross Domestic Product per capita is not on the high side, the prices of hotels can be relatively high. This is a two edge sword, in that it may at the same time discourage visitors on low budgets, but attracts up-market tourists. However in general value for money is a tourist attraction and island states that aspire to attract tourists should do well to provide attractively priced tourist accommodation.

A final conclusion is that tourist inflows in the small island states considered, is broadly correlated with the cost of flight to and accommodation costs in these countries.

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APPENDIX

Table 11:

Region of Origin of Tourists

Destination	Heathrow (representing Europe)	Miami (representing USA)	Melbourne (representing Australia and new Zealand)
Antigua & Barbuda	46%	54%	0%
The Bahamas	7%	80%	13%
Barbados	44%	56%	0%
Cyprus	95%	4%	1%
Fiji	59%	10%	31%
Jamaica	16%	72%	12%
Maldives	77%	21%	2%
Malta	77%	2%	21%
Mauritius	65%	32%	3%
Seychelles	68%	31%	1%
St Lucia	31%	36%	33%
Vanuatu	5%	21%	74%

Sources: (all sites were accessed on 20th June 2009)

Antigua and Barbuda.:http://www.ab.gov.ag/gov_v2/government/statsandreports/statsandreports2005/visitor_arrivals1998_2004.pdf

Bahamas: http://www.onecaribbean.org/content/files/april16Lattab08.pdf

Barbados. http://caribbean.visitbarbados.org/pressroom/uploads/statisticsDocuments/4D99DAEA-70A7-43CF-B1C7-0F88ADF0638C.pdf

Cyprus:http://www.pio.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/04FC8CD16DC67222C225755A0033E1E6/$file/TOURISM_MONTHLY_ARRIVALS_DEC08-EN-190109.xls?OpenElement

Fiji:.http://www.spc.int/prism/country/FJ/Stats/Tourism/Visitor_Arrivals-resid.htm

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St. Lucia. http://www.onecaribbean.org/content/files/2004StLuciastats.pdf

Vanuatu. http://www.spc.int/prism/Country/VU/stats/P_releases/Monthly/Tourism/Apr09.pdf

These percentages were used as weights in Table 4 so that the price of travel reflected the region of origin of the tourists. Thus for example the price of flights from Australia to Cyprus was only given 1 percent weight. On the other hand the prices of flights from Heathrow to Cyprus were given 95 percent weight.